

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
Robert and Renée Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

R. Nicholas Burns
Roy and Barbara Goodman Family Professor
of Diplomacy and International Relations



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New England Council Annual Dinner
Remarks by Ambassador R. Nicholas Burns
November 1, 2016

Thanks to Jim Brett who personifies the bipartisan ethos of the New England Council.

I am grateful for this unexpected award.

And I am honored by it.

How could I not be honored to be on the same dais as:

--Abby d'Agostino whose extraordinary athleticism and grace inspired us at the Rio Olympics;

--Governor Gina Raimondo who has launched a courageous reform of public finances in Rhode Island;

--Jeff Immelt who made the wise decision to make GE's home here in the Athens of America—in Boston.

I'll be brief because many of you want to get home to watch the Chicago Red Sox, aka the Cubs, win to stay alive after 108 years of futility;

Jim asked me to speak briefly about the road ahead in foreign policy for our country after the election.

I have two thoughts about America's role in the world—one about Challenge and one about Hope.

On the first, I do believe that our next President will face the most challenging and most complex global agenda since the end of WWII;

--Now there is a silver lining—the good news is that about one week from now, our long national nightmare will be nearing its end—this brutal, divisive, bitter election will be just about over.

--The victor will face the following challenges overseas:

--Europe rapidly weakening economically, beset by right-wing populism, an avalanche of refugees and uncertain leadership.

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--And Vladimir Putin is on the march dividing Europe again 25 years after the Cold War's end.
--The Middle East is in a revolutionary spiral of war, instability and chaos:
--4 Failed States; 12 million homeless in Syria alone, a sectarian war raging in the region between Sunni and Shia;
--And in the Asia-Pacific, China is pushing out to claim other country's territory in the South China Sea; and it is contesting American power and predominance in that vital region;

Our next President will face these three vital challenges and many more.

And she, or he, will inherit a country reeling and divided from the most ugly campaign in our modern history.

--Lincoln said eloquently in his second inaugural, at the end of the Civil War, that we needed above all else to "bind up the nation's wounds";

--Our next President will need to bind up some gaping wounds:

--The wide gap between Red America and Blue America on Immigration, on Refugees and on Trade; whether we should contain Putin or befriend him; whether we are faithful to our allies or cut them loose;

--There is a profound gap in our country on whether we should continue to be and act like the world leader we are or whether we should shrink and hide from those responsibilities;

--The most important wound may well be the disappearance of civility and grace in our public dialogue between Republicans and Democrats.

--There is at least one exception to this pattern—Governor Charlie Baker who is always civil, graceful, bipartisan and pragmatic in working hard on our problems here in Massachusetts; As a citizen, I really appreciate how he has led.

--The next President needs to heal the country. Govern from the Center; Reach across to the opposition party and make Washington work for all of us.

--We need bipartisanship and on indeed many issues, non-partisanship.

But, let me conclude on a note of Hope.

--Because Hope does spring eternal. There is always Hope.

--I am hopeful about America's role in the world:

--We have the strongest and most innovative economy;

--We retain the most powerful military;

--We are the most influential country politically;

--Despite what we have heard in the campaign, America has major advantages over our rivals, like Russia and China.

--We just need to recognize our power and our purpose and be self-confident in them—to be the great beacon of Democracy and Freedom in the world.

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And we New Englanders have so much to be positive and optimistic and hopeful about:

--We are perfectly constructed to be competitive in the 21st century knowledge economy—we are leaders in Education; in Science and Engineering, Bio and Nano technology—right here in the Seaport and in Kendall Square.

We are Global Leaders in Health Care.

We are built to succeed in this century.

--My wife, Libby and I grew up here in Massachusetts. We left after college for thirty years---to live in the Sahara Desert, Egypt, Israel, Greece and Belgium as well as in an exotic capital—Washington D.C.

--We used to dream about the New England we missed:

--Stone walls and green fields in Westport;

--The perfection of the Boston Public Garden, Plum Island, the White and Green Mountains, Acadia National Park, Newport and Mystic.

--We could visualize the simple beauty of Trinity Church, BC's Saint Ignatius and another cathedral here in Boston—Fenway Park.

Our six state region is a very special place.

We face out across the Atlantic to the rest of the world.

Our businesses and scientists and doctors and students are making their imprint on the world from New England.

There is hope here for the future.

Thanks to the New England Council for this memorable evening.